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# Press Release

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PR 170608

13.03.2017

**PRESS RELEASE BY THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

*Speech by the President of Malta at the European Sports and Youth Forum*

Parliamentary Secretary Chris Agius  
David Agius  
Representatives of the European Commission  
Youth Leaders  
Distinguished guests  
Dear friends

It is my pleasure to address this roundtable meeting of the EU Youth Sports Forum.

As a united family of European nations, sports has a significant role to play, not only with regards to the physical and mental quality of life of our peoples, but very importantly to build and to strength the relations between our peoples.

Sports brings people together, in a way that has the ability, in an uncontentious manner, to deliver, subtly, a much-needed message of inclusion, of participation, of peace, and of active citizenship.

I am informed that the themes discussed during this seminar have included the importance of social inclusion and volunteering; the need to promote healthy lifestyles; and the role of sport as a means of diplomacy.

I must thank you for the opportunity to offer some of my reflections on these key themes, in the light of the work I do in collaboration with national and international authorities, and civil society activists.

I believe that achieving synergies between these different stakeholders is crucial, if we are to live up to strengthening our commitment towards an effective social Europe.

It is important for us to safeguard the vitality of our European Union for the generations to come.

Let me begin by saying, from the outset, that sports diplomacy has emerged, during many of my discussions with different collaborators, as an essential component in our combined efforts to build more resilient relations among the communities that share our Union.

We have learnt that sports diplomacy brings out the passion and the dedication for sports, which our peoples hold in common.

**Attachments: photos**

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We have learnt that sports therefore is an effective way to transcend linguistic and sociocultural differences across borders.

We have learnt that the universal language of sports brings people together, encouraging leadership, teamwork, and communication skills; these skills are of vital importance in helping young people to succeed in all areas of their lives.

Sports is a means to build bridges and to pull down walls.  
Sports brings to us a social conscience, and an attitude of benevolence.

It is all this that should make us more committed to continue working together to promote innovative ways of furthering the magnitude outcome of sports diplomacy.

We must intensify our efforts to creatively support the work of sports diplomacy, as a means of increasing dialogue and cultural understanding among the diverse communities and groups in Europe.

We are all aware of the important role of sports in maintaining active and healthy lifestyles, as another area of key importance.

Physical health, alongside mental and emotional health, are of paramount importance in maintaining the well-being of the individual, of the family, and of the community.

The well-being of our societies depends on the investment we make to ensure that citizens, especially our young people, are capable of accessing and maintaining an optimal quality of life.

People at risk of poverty, or living in precarity, need additional support in order to access the benefits that sports can bring. Therefore, we must do more, to include everybody, no matter their socio-economic background or circumstances.

Sports opportunities must be fairly and equally available to all.

According to the latest indicators from last year's Eurostat, supported by data from the World Health Organisation, half the adult population of the European Union are obese or overweight.

Europe has the second highest proportion of overweight or obese people in the world, after the United States of America.

Furthermore, Malta scored among the highest in terms of reported obesity, for both men (24.7%) and women (21.1%).

Obesity negatively impacts the individual in many ways, with a direct link to decreased well-being. Tackling the risks of obesity is an important overall strategy for preventive social spending, addressing the economic and social impacts of unhealthy lifestyles.

We cannot afford to be complacent on this issue.

According to a report by Price Waterhouse Cooper, published earlier this month, the cost of adult obesity in Malta has climbed to 36 million euros per annum.

This data is based on self-reporting of Body Mass Index, and it is estimated that costs would rise by an additional 20 million euros when measured rates of BMI are used.

There is definitely so much more that we can do with these funds, if they could be put to other uses within society.

I urge you to work more together to make the necessary change happen.

This change must begin now.

We need each other to share good practices, and to find innovative ways of stimulating the imagination and the energy of our young and older generations to take up the challenge.

This brings me to the overarching importance of social inclusion, which is a priority area at the heart of Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

By promoting the ability of sports to create new relationships between different communities, while strengthening old friendships, we are putting the work of inclusion into practice, tangibly and credibly.

If we encourage volunteering, to stimulate social inclusion, then we are automatically practicing solidarity, as active and committed citizens of our nations and our Union.

On the other hand, peace-building through sports is an effective way forward for the future of our European Union.

Sports can create the necessary safe spaces where people who may never have had the opportunity to meet one another can do so, in an environment which is healthy and respectful.

Let me share with you a recent experience at a consultation meeting with the Muslim communities in Malta. I was happy to hear participants talk about their children playing football alongside students coming from other communities and having different faith traditions.

I was told that, through extra-curricular sporting activities such as these, our young people are meeting one another on a level playing field, as equals and as friends, learning more about one another and creating safe and effective connections which will have a positive impact in their lives, and in the future of my country.

This is one example of the power of a truly inclusive approach, which sports can make possible in Malta, in the European Union, and around the world.

While I wish you much success in your deliberations, I hope that your recommendations shall provide effective and targeted responses to the social, economic, political, and cultural challenges being faced by families, communities, and societies across our European Union.

Let me conclude by taking the opportunity to appeal to all of our political authorities to take up all your recommendations, and implement them effectively, for the benefit of younger and older generations, both present and future.

I am so convinced that your work, within the sporting sectors and different institutions that you represent, will make a much needed contribution along our journey, to achieve a European Union which is more fully capable of safeguarding and celebrating the values of solidarity, of peace, and of well-being which are at the heart of our united European identity.

Thank you, and I look forward to exploring the outcomes of your meetings.